

The last word The politics of editing, part 2

by the editors

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In the first editorial in this series, in JUMP CUT 15, we discussed the material conditions — our financial and human resources — which shape JUMP CUT. The internal organization and functioning of the staff exercises another major influence on our finished product, the JUMP CUT you hold in your hands. The way in which any group organizes itself and functions has a genuine political dimension, whether it is consciously worked out or not. Here we want to describe our internal organization in its basic form. In future editorials we will elaborate these concerns in terms of our process of internal education and criticism and our relations with writers and readers.

There are any number of ways of running a film magazine. A publication can be structured around the idea of accepting the conventional best of its declared range of interest. The editor, in this case, simply acts as a judge who passes on the quality of whatever comes in. In a very different vein, one individual may run the publication on the basis on his/her personal vision. Such a model has the flaws and virtues of its leader. The result can be daring, bizarre, original, offbeat, or just plain awful. Further, a more or less unified group of people with a specific program can run the publication together. This model tends to represent the opinions of a closely associated core group with outsiders contributing if they fit in with what is going on. Such a model for internal organization can develop considerable depth and a general "line," but it also relies on people being geographically concentrated.

JUMP CUT has a different kind of organization, based on both political considerations and on the material conditions we discussed in issue 15. The primary political consideration shaping JUMP CUT's staff organization can be expressed in terms of our political unity: Our first basis of agreement is to put out a magazine basically like JUMP CUT — one that defines itself as nonsectarian left, anti-racist, anti-imperialist,

anti-capitalist, and anti-sexist. To some that might sound forbidding, to others it might sound vague. We've been called both utopian and arrogant for proclaiming these politics openly in a film magazine. But these politics have genuine implications for the actual practice of JUMP CUT and reflect a deeper political analysis, much of which has been described in previous editorials.

We believe that given the present state of the U.S left, it is important for cultural work to proceed on the basis of uniting as many people as possible, allowing political differences to emerge and to be actively debated so as to educate all the participants as well as our readers. Thus we are open to people of various tendencies on the left and reach out to people who share our critique of capitalism, especially women, lesbians and gays, blacks and other third world people, who most sharply feel their special oppression. Others of our readers may be sympathetic to a left critique of capitalism but might not have yet developed a political analysis of that oppression and the social formation that causes and uses it. In this context, we think it is very important to present a clear left alternative for people to confront, debate, and decide about.

Although a collective structure would best fit our political philosophy and needs, we are not a collective — for several reasons. First, in simply pragmatic terms, we cannot operate as a collective because we can't and don't all meet together regularly due to geographic dispersion. In fact, the whole editorial board (the associate editors and the two co-editors) have never met, and that seems even less likely as the board continues to grow. Most editors don't know half of the other editors. Even if we could afford the job-time loss, it would cost a great deal of money simply to fly everyone to one place for a meeting (a major problem of organizing a nationally based, left project). Although we lose a lot of mutual support, reinforcement, stimulation, political dialogue, and friendship from this dispersion, we gain a tremendous breadth and variety, which prevents provincialism and inbreeding.

Another reason we are not a collective is that we were not initially formed as one. The two co-editors, John Hess and Chuck Kleinhans, had the most time to put in initially, and the three initial associate editors (Judy Hess, Julia Lesage, and Bill Van Wert) wanted only an advisory role. Since then we have added other members and grown. Some people have joined by direct appointment to the editorial board after working closely with JUMP CUT, but more often people have worked on JUMP CUT by getting involved with one of the local groups (in the Bay Area, Chicago, and now New York City). In the past 18 months, many new people have begun working on JUMP CUT, and the structuring of power and responsibility is gradually changing in response to new conditions and new ideas. At present the organization of JUMP CUT is in a process of development, spurred by political discussion. Thus, while we can describe our organizational structure in spring, 1978, here, we fully

expect that a year from now the pattern will be different, and in spring, 1980, different again. This change is not haphazard, but it is not predictable. The outcome depends on political principles, such as trying to achieve group democracy, and at the same time on our dealing with practical limits such as geographic dispersion, different skills, and different amounts of time and commitment, while trying to keep the day-to-day operation going. In short, we learn, we grow, we change.

JUMP CUT presently has two co-editors who mutually make policy and final editorial decisions and do much of the on-going work of putting out JUMP CUT. The magazine does not pay for itself, and the co-editors contribute most of the subsidy. Because of the time that the co-editors (John Hess and Chuck Kleinhans) put into JUMP CUT and the commitment they have to it, they are the most significant powers in shaping it. Each can veto a decision of the other (though in practice this has never happened; differences have been worked out in discussion). Living in separate places, they communicate by letter, tape recordings, telephone, and visits to each other about twice a year. The actual workload shifts from time to time onto one or the other editor, depending on the exigencies of earning a living.

Three JUMP CUT work groups exist. The first was formed in Chicago, where all layout and distribution was originally done. The second, in Berkeley, now has taken over much of the material process of layout and all of the distribution and business work. In the fall of 1977, a third group began meeting in New York. Each group reads and comments on manuscripts, handles bookstore distribution in their area, and has taken on as a task the handling of one or more special sections.

John and Chuck bring all significant policy decisions to the three work groups and the editorial board members (some of whom live in other places). While only advisory, the board actually exercises great influence in raising issues and deciding on policy changes, and most importantly in evaluating manuscripts. Every incoming manuscript is read by several members of the editorial board. Who reads what depends on areas of interest and specialization, time available, and so forth. Evaluations, comments, and suggested revisions are collected. In cases of clear differences on the board in evaluating an article, other board members read the manuscript in order to help make the final decision. Once these evaluations are gathered in Chicago or Berkeley, an editor responds to the writer.

We circulate articles and reviews written by anyone working on JUMP CUT to as many staff members as possible for input and decision-making. Because what editors write for the magazine has the effect of giving direction, setting policy, supplying leadership to readers and possible contributors, it is important to involve everyone on the board in the process. This policy has additional importance as a way of holding

the co-editors accountable for what they write for JUMP CUT. We find that writing for publication functions as a learning process. Discussion of each other's work contributes to the political and intellectual growth of all of us.

Since becoming JUMP CUT's book review editor, Jerry Peary has occupied a special position with regard to that area, since he keeps track of new books, contacts writers, does the initial editing, and corresponds with writers. Similarly, Ernie Larsen has just taken on responsibility for getting reviews of current commercial films. Both are part of the new New York group. In addition, different editors are coordinating upcoming special sections. Julianne Burton is working on one on Cuban cinema, and the women on the editorial board are working on a special section on lesbians and film. Bob Stam is coordinating a section on Brazilian film. Other sections are planned on video and broadcast TV.

The people listed as assistant editors occupy a kind of "trial" position, having worked on JUMP CUT for three months. After another four months and the recommendation of a co-editor, they will also become associate editors. We also have some people listed as helpers on each issue. Some regularly participate in the Berkeley, Chicago, or New York group and are becoming assistant editors. Other folks occasionally help out with various tasks, but don't participate in decision-making. The only people who receive money for their labor are our typists, who prepare articles for printing, and our printers.

JUMP CUT defines itself as a political project and all the people working on it see this work as political activity. The primary reward we get for this work is the satisfaction of participating in political struggle in an area — culture — that is important to us. By being involved in such a project, we learn skills, grow intellectually and politically, and gain confidence in ourselves. People learn how to do layout, edit copy, discuss manuscripts politically, write to contributors, operate a magazine like JUMP CUT, and, perhaps most important, how to work politically with each other.

Because of the editors' dispersion, our various levels of political experience, our different political positions, anything approaching a JUMP CUT "line" is impossible. We balance uncomfortably between wanting the clarity of a unified approach to films (Tanner yes or no, Hollywood great or horrible, independent films important or not) and recognizing the pluralism that the nature of our editorial board and the needs of the times necessitate. We recognize, too, that contradictions are inevitable in any political structure or activity and that it is best to deal with them openly rather than try to hide them. Thus tension and diversity are very much part of JUMP CUT and underlie its creativity, growth, and variety. As it should be, JUMP CUT is an arena of political struggle.

Because of the diversity of views, personalities, and work styles, because geographic dispersion makes close personal ties difficult to establish and maintain, relations on JUMP CUT are sometimes stormy. In a group situation (in Berkeley, Chicago, New York) or with the relations between isolated editors and Chuck and John, political disagreements are dealt with openly, often with consultation with the other work groups.

However distressing conflict may be personally, we feel that raising and dealing with contradictions is an essential part of any viable political project. We have tried to bring some of these debates into the pages of the magazine. For example, in JUMP CUT 15 we printed two views of Tanner's JONAH which brought out some distinct political differences in the staff. Other contrasting articles and reviews, and the ongoing discussion in Critical Dialogue, demonstrate the kind of diversity we favor.

JUMP CUT does not, as some people have assumed, present *the* Marxist film criticism. In fact, not all the editors are Marxists and many of our writers are not. We also have to recognize disagreements among Marxists and other radicals in many areas of culture and politics. Because we try to deal with differences and diversity in as open and politically principled a way as possible, JUMP CUT continues to change, grow, and improve.

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